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FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7942
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000676

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [RU](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: ARMENIA NOT TO RECOGNIZE SOUTH OSSETIA AND
ABKHAZIA, WILL SEEK TO REMAIN "NEUTRAL"

REF: A) STATE 91894 B) YEREVAN 674

Classified By: CDA JOSEPH PENNINGTON FOR REASONS 1.4(B)(D)

¶1. (C) CDA delivered Ref A demarche points to Armenian Foreign Minister Nalbandian in a meeting on August 27. Nalbandian responded that Armenia will not recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia "at this time." He added, however, that Armenia's critical relationship with Russia would preclude a public condemnation of the Russian decree. The FM argued that Armenia is in "the most difficult position of any country" on this issue, citing the need to balance important relationships with Russia and Georgia while also weighing the implications of recent developments for the future of Nagorno-Karabakh.

¶2. (C) Nalbandian said that "the best we can do in these circumstances" is to remain neutral. He noted that Armenia had been supportive of Georgia from the beginning of the crisis -- by accepting refugees and serving as a corridor for humanitarian assistance -- but also needed to protect its "strategic relationship" with Russia. The FM said he would travel to Tbilisi September 12-13 to meet with his Georgian counterpart, even while acknowledging Armenia's continuing frustration over a perceived lack of cooperation by Georgian authorities in alleviating shortages of fuel and wheat in Armenia. Nalbandian claimed the GOAM had resisted calls by some to publicly criticize Georgia for obstructing shipments, and asserted that Armenia values its "neighborly relations" with the Georgians.

¶3. (C) Nalbandian claimed that Armenia is under pressure from the Russians to recognize the two regions' independence, and predicted growing domestic pressure for Armenia to recognize them as part of a strategy to achieve the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. He said the GOAM understands it cannot go down that path, and remains committed to the Minsk Group process and a negotiated settlement for N-K. The FM noted that Armenia continues to support the settlement of regional conflicts based on three principles -- non-use of force, self-determination, and territorial integrity -- and would reflect this position in its public statements. (Comment: Despite the FM's reassurances, statements by President Sargsian and the MFA spokesman have omitted any mention of territorial integrity. End comment.) Nalbandian also made clear that Armenia remained committed to its partnership with NATO, and said Russian policies toward NATO would not change that commitment.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) While direct, public criticism of Russia by the GOAM was never in the cards, Nalbandian's hedging on the recognition issue shows that we will need to continue making clear at every opportunity the costs for Armenia's

relationship with the United States of following the Russian lead. Nalbandian is probably correct in saying that the pressure on Armenia -- both foreign and domestic -- on the recognition issue will only increase over time. It will take a sustained effort on our part to ensure that the GOAM doesn't cave.

PENNINGTON